SOMETIME IN PHILADELPHIA

. . . And it's a big welcome to you from Fun Tours Inc. as we set off on our scenic tour of skidrow bums, terminal TV and (in New York, actually) a loathsome flying pig which appears to urinate on THIN LIZZY's Phil Lynott. Your courier is TONY PARSONS.

ALL THESE flowers are *diseased* or something . . . dozens of anaemic white buds on wilting blue stalks all around . . . drooping defeated and dying away from the heavens and life, their shoots sagging sadly in the miasma of stony ground, split food, fag ash, yesterday's papers and brat puke.

These flowers are *sick fatal*. I close my eyes and count to ten and when I open them the flowers are still there . . .

And Phil Lynott sits in the Madison Square Garden arena puffing on a Stephen's Green special while gazing at P. Floyd's excessive *Animals* extravaganza. He looks away from the flashing light-show and special dry ice and up at the massive inflated pig floating aimlessly through the atmosphere high above him.

Suddenly the impertinent pile of pork empties its bowels and a stream of piss rains from the sky soaking Phil Lynott . . .

Ah, the hallucinogenic engineering powers of jet lag, culture shock and others.

Whaddaya say, Phil?

"I was getting wet and I thought this fooking pig was pissing all over me. It turned out some kid in the balcony had thrown his beer at the fooking thing."

And the smug, crackling Big Daddy voice of our Captain speaking over the intercom brought me back to reality, or rather 35,000 feet and total exhaustion.

"British Airways would like to apologise —"

Hey, there's no need for that, Pops.

A seven-hour delay stationary in the great silver bird at Heathrow (old ladies bold enough to venture beyond the immigration lines in search of bread and water beaten back by obese stewardesses tetchy because they don't resemble the uniformed fantasies depicted in adverts), then seven hours in the air plus a five-hour time difference thrown into psychosomatic stew . . . it works better than acid, Pops-man.

It really had me believing those two-quid-a-shot blue rubber headsets with their dinky white plastic earplugs for your flight movie soundtrack were really and truly the Chelsea Flower Show after they'd dropped THE BIG ONE.

But the florid flightmares are nearly over. The chariot of fire is practically deserted now.

Richard (ten) and his brother Simon (seven) who kept asking me, "Would you be surprised if your editor asked you to be in the Space Shuttle?" and "When are the Monkees reforming and coming to our town?" (y'know, just your average American middle-class kiddies) got off with their Mom in Boston hours ago along with everybody else . . . oh, it's been a real neat flight, Pops . . .

"We will be landing in Philadelphia in 15 minutes. Please fasten your seat belts."

Be right with ya, Pops, just lemme get this headset outa my buttonhole, okay?

Bumpy touch-down (at last), toothy beam bye-bye (false gits), passport control (suspicion about the Polish visa, the Smokie story obviously just a cover), customs, and out to a taxi. The news on the radio drawls that Keith Moon just died. Industrial fairy-lights and high-rise boredom-blocks drift by (oh, sorry, Welcome To America).

Pix: CHALKIE DAVIES

OUT FRONT of the Holiday Inn Phil Lynott is hanging out on the street. Moon's death has shaken him badly.

"We're a dying breed," he reflects. "All we've got is rock'n'roll and the road, we got no wives, no family, no homes . . . just this."

We make our way over to the hotel lobby and it transpires that the habitual luck of the Lizzy (it decimates the band's ranks prior to Stateside tours) has struck again. Brian Downey is back home, illness in his family preventing him from going on the road. His place on drums is taken by a young American called Mark Nasseef.

Downey's enforced absence brings to mind Lynott's hepatitis and Brian

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Robertson's slashed tendons that have disrupted previous New World sojourns.

"It's Scott's turn next," Lynott smiles grimly, the lift whisking us up to our rooms. "Or Gary's . . ."

Gary Moore, late of Colosseum II, is a permanent member of Lizzy for the first time since 1974. He stood in for Brian Robertson on the US tour last year and his inclusion in the new Lizzy line-up came as no surpirse.

"Brian wants to form his own band," says Lynott. "He couldn't have come on this tour anyway. He got into a fight down the Speakeasy and got three broken ribs and a fractured jaw. Some geezer said something to him and Brian laid into him and then the geezer's mates were all over him."

We check into my room but, unfortunately there are already two middle-aged black women living there, so it's down the corridor to Phil's room until the Lizzy management can come up with alternative accommodation.

With the overwhelming trash of the Yankee TV Eye as a backdrop we sit smoking while Phil mourns Moon and thinks aloud about the dying breed.

Not having second thoughts about rock'n'roll, are you, Phil?

He shakes his head and grins. "Nah, not me, never! I'm sick of hearing about what a fooking drag it is on the road. You choose this life and it's the best life in the world for the unattached male. I wouldn't have it any other way . . ."

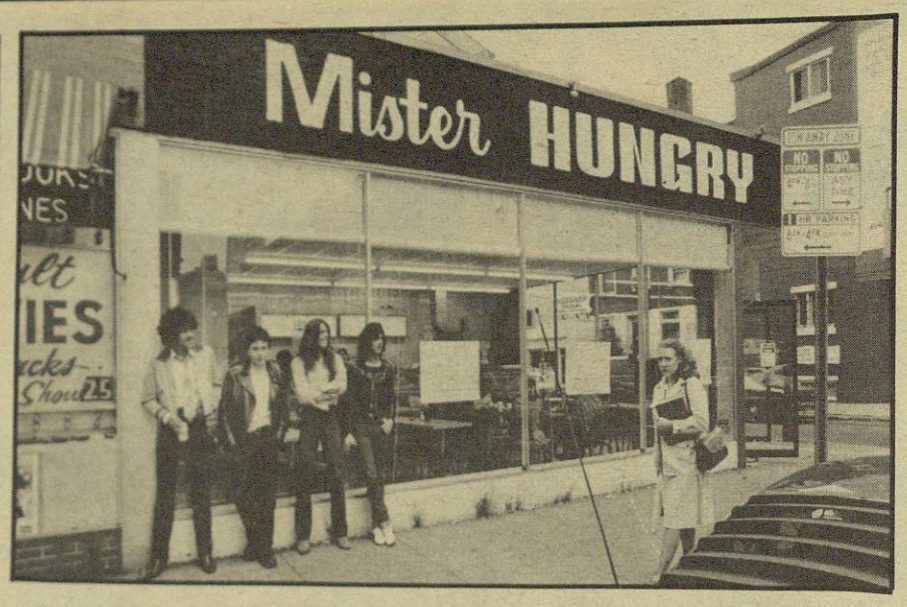
After I've dumped my Adidas bag in my own private dorm I stumble out into the hot summer night (84 degrees at midnight) in search of sustenance to satiate my famine, physical and mental exhaustion and munchies.

Room service closed down at 10.30. Who said all Holiday Inns were the same?

MAYOR RIZZO WELCOMES YOU TO PHILADELPHIA.

Ah, sweet soul city Philly, home of Philadelphia International Records, Kenny Gamble, Leon Huff, Thom Bell, O'Jays, Stylistics, Delfonics, Three Degrees, MFSB, Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes *et al.*

Home of Italian Mayor Rizzo, currently seeking to change the constitution that prevents the city's Mayor from serving more than two terms in office (Mayor Rizzo has currently served two consecutive terms in office.).



The Black Panthers tried to win over Philadelphia in the early '70s and failed to create a favourable impression with either Mayor Rizzo or the city's massive indigenous black population.

Rizzo stripped the Panthers naked and lined them up against the wall for a national press photographic session while white journalists and photographers down from the liberal New York City press with the Panthers discovered that their affiliations with the "revolutionaries" didn't mean a thing to the "sticksmen" operative in black Philly street-gangs.

"But we're with the Panthers!" protested one native New Yorker as he handed over his wallet.

"This ain't a Panther neighbourhood," he was informed. "The Youngblood Falcons rule the roost 'round here, man."

Recalling the anecdote, I wander through crews of shirt-sleeved hoods, They seem to be admiring my jacket a little too much for comfort, and I am deterred from wandering more than a few miles in search of food.

I head back towards the Holiday Inn. At traffic lights bums are approaching stationary cars for a few coins. In the fall, after the first snow, I hear that a truck comes around to pick up the ones who have frozen to death.

Philly bums look the same as New York bums. In the Bowery a bum with no legs and a wheelchairs shits in the gutter and spends most of his time screaming at the other bums to keep their hands off his wheelchair. Some of them don't wait for the cold weather, they stab themselves to death and get thrown in the back of the morgue-bound ambulance while across the street the CBGB punks tell the clientele how angry they are.

REFRESHED AFTER a good night's sleep and a breakfast of two steaks, four eggs and a pint of milk, I indulge in America's favourite pastime until it's time to join Lizzy on their interview tour of Philly radio stations.

Watching Yankee telly is a fair Drinking Class approximation of the physical and mental numbing properties induced by the expensive white powders taken wherever The Ugly People go; a cosy little mind cocoon, so much more palatable than the distasteful smells of Real Life, so much innocuous brain candy that you can almost believe you'll never have to think for yourself again.

With an unhealthy repletion of stations transmitting around the 24-hour clock, you can switch stations until your unpaid bills touch the ceiling and your landlord is hammering on the door for a fortune in rent money.

Baseball, the commission investigation the assassination of JFK, cartoons, quiz shows, chat shows, soaps and adverts, *adverts*, ADVERTS, ***ADVERTS*** until they're coming to take you away to the funny-farm, those nice young men in their clean white coats (ha ha).

But right now it's still early morning and mostly it's just programmes on which celebrities are being interviewed about how they used to be into hard drugs, the occult, sexual perversion, alcoholism, etc. I watched maybe six of these shows and they all followed the same format; discussion of juicy sensationalism issues for nearly 30 minutes and suddenly . . .

"But then you discovered the Lord, didn't you, Jim?"

"I sure did, John! Praise the Lord!"

"Let us all get on our knees to pray and give thanks to the Lord."

Everyone than spends the last minute of the show on the bended knees. Religious shows, don't ya just love 'em?

Despite popular opinion there is absolutely *no* live television in America. The nearest it gets to live is when shows are recorded and viewed by the network censorship board a few hours before actual screening. There are two reasons for this insulation.

The first was the time when a chat-show host's provocative audience interrogation caused one member of the audience to pull a gun on him. The host himself had pulled his own fire-arm before the show was taken off the air.

On this occasion nobody was hurt — unlike the second reason for the total absence of live television in the States. This time a female newsreader announced that she intended to commit suicide. Then she pulled a Saturday Night Special out of her handbag and splattered her brains all over studio's ceiling.

And if that sounds familiar, it should do; it's the actual occurence that, uh, inspired the movie *Network*.

SCOTT GORHAM, Gary Moore, Phil Lynott and myself are driven around the Philly radio stations by a record company representative — a lady from Warner Brothers, the band's American label these days now that they've split from Mercury.

"It's the only label I know," says Lynott, "who give their acts a manual of where to go after a gig; nightclubs, bars and the local venereal disease clinics."

Ah, the glamour of being a wandering minstrel.

The boredom of interminable radio interviews with all their crass questioning is alleviated slightly as your humble hero, so far from home, sits in and passes himself off as Thin Lizzy's drummer.

It's the personable vocalist/bassist, of course, on whom attention is focused as he astutely handles the same old Lizzy questions with blarney-blessed charm.

". . .the 'Live And Dangerous' album marks the end of an era. . .Thin Lizzy's appeal to girls is the same as what *I* feel when I listen to Joni Mitchell. . .Scott once stopped me during a rehearsal and asked me if the lyrics I was singing were the same ones I sang on stage; he'd never noticed them before. . .Bachman Turner Overdrive are the only band who have a three-course meal *before* a gig. . .we were supporting Bob Seger and couldn't get him to do 'Rosalie' so we did it ourselves. . .Philly's always a good date for us. . ."

AND IT is a good one, this night at Philly's The Tower hall, the author's enjoyment and Lynott's performance certainly not hampered at all by partaking in a cheap, speedy local delicacy known as Monster, which tends to make one's snout feel like a flame-thrower.

Nasseef on drums is no Brian Downey but, that aside, it's Thin Lizzy, still the same. . .giants back home, big in the states and hammering away on the long hard slog to becoming massive.

Can they do it? Can they break through to the crass, opulent league of Styx, Starz, Godz, Kansas, Boston, Foreigner, Kiss. . .all these hamfisted HM practitioners who posture for packed arenas of qualluded American Kidz, all these bands who mean less than zilch in the UK and are bigger than The Beatles ever were Stateside?

Well, I really like Lynott and Lizzy so. . .gee, I hope not.

Backstage the bachelor boys are preparing to partake in the evening's pulling, their Warner Brothers manuals at the ready. An ebullient young Yankee ligger bursts into the dressing room, rubbing his hands lasciviously.

"Okay, guys," he gushes, "now for the *real* gig!!"

Phil Lynott didn't bust the geezer's face.

I would have felt a lot happier if he had.